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The Leeds Met Book of Resilience

By Lucia Poole and Ruth Lefever, with Jacqueline Stevenson, Sean Dirrane and Amanda Wilson





Introduction

This booklet has arisen from a research project funded by Aimhigher West Yorkshire and undertaken at Leeds Metropolitan University. In a series of interviews, 20 students described the difficulties and problems they have encountered when studying in higher education and the strategies and resources they have used to overcome these problems and move on.

Based on their experiences, this booklet has been designed to help you to think through any similar difficulties you may be encountering and, using your own strengths, capabilities and sources of support, help you to set and achieve realistic goals to overcome these problems and enjoy your time as a student.

The booklet includes advice about how to build coping strategies and suggestions for people who could help you if you are facing difficulties. Acknowledging your own skills but also talking to other people, asking questions and seeking support when you need it can be the key to working through adversity. We recommend that you work through this booklet with a member of staff, for example a personal tutor, the counselling service, or a close friend. They can discuss with you any problems you may be experiencing and help you use the booklet as a toolkit to solve and overcome them. Try not to feel that you are alone; many other students also experience

difficulties and there is a lot of help available. This booklet is just one way to offer support and it might not have all the answers for everyone, but we hope that it will be of benefit to many students. At the back you will find resources and further suggestions of where to go for additional guidance or support.

We would like to thank Aimhigher for initially funding the research project and also for their support in producing the booklet. The process of revising the content for the booklet was a collaborative experience involving many staff and researchers and students at both Leeds Met and elsewhere. We would particularly like to thank Professor Phil Race (Emeritus Professor at Leeds Met) for helping with the drafting; all the students who agreed to be interviewed, since without them we would have no booklet; and those students who helped to review the contents during the focus groups: Megan Taylor, Pete King and Umar Hameed.

The project team:

Jacqueline Stevenson, Ruth Lefever, Lucia Poole, Amanda Wilson, Sean Dirrane, Emma Stedman and Professor Sally Brown

Remember that if you are feeling down or struggling, you are not the only one feeling like this – we all have periods like this.



Sean Dirrane, one of the project's researchers, originally a student on a widening participation programme, has gone on to complete a Masters degree and made a DVD (available from Leeds Met) about his journey from foster care to success as a member of Leeds Met staff.

Saima

I am 26 years old and a part-time student. To be honest I thought I wasn't intelligent and some people would say my English and maths was weak, so from that I took it on board and I decided that I needed to get some knowledge; I had a diploma but needed to re-take some GCSEs to get on my course – which I did and got offered a place.

Did you face any challenges?

I have still struggled with the maths and science and there was plenty of hard work to do. I did start as a full-time student but also had a lot of family problems to deal with and my attendance got poor and I wasn't successful in my exams.

How did you feel?

I thought that the others on the course had more understanding and experience than me and sometimes I'd think that, oh, these people are so intelligent and I am not as clever and it puts me down. I am quite sensitive – general problems, life problems, you know, somebody upsetting me – that's where I am sensitive. All this and the problems with my family and that my work suffered made me think I'd have to leave.

What did you do?

I told my lecturer as I thought I should explain because if I didn't, they would think I wasn't interested in the course. He was really understanding, and for a good hour he actually sat with me one to one and gave me a lot of help. He advised me to do the second year on a part-time basis rather than giving up the course completely.

What was the result?

Being part-time means I may be able to handle any problems better – I have gone on a safer path. I am actually enjoying the course now; and feel I learn different things every day – it keeps me going. Now, I try to ignore negative comments or feelings about my abilities and not put myself down – I've been chosen to be on the course after all. I am also overcoming things by mixing with people and going out more, participating in things – it's making me more confident. I saw what happened as a life experience and I was able to understand people better. I think university is not just about learning, it has given me that confidence as well, you know, to be more resilient.



What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to bounce back or cope successfully despite adversity. You could also think about it as 'stick-ability' – the ability to hang on in when the going gets tough. A resilient person is someone who adapts well to a stressful event or challenge and finds new ways of coping.

When do you need to be resilient at university?

Coming to university can be an exciting and enjoyable time, but it can also be confusing and overwhelming – particularly at first. You might be worried about:

- making new friends
- worrying about whether you've made the right choices
- dealing with new flatmates and living independently
- anxiety about grades and meeting deadlines
- keeping up with fellow students
- socialising and enjoying your time at university but still having time to study
- living up to others' expectations
- finding your way around an unfamiliar campus and/or city
- getting to grips with the library and picking up new study skills
- working out what academic regulations mean
- managing part-time work and study
- worrying about money and debt.

Finding university and university life difficult is very common. Don't be fooled into thinking you are the only person struggling – lots of other students will feel exactly the same, but many won't admit to it. It's all very well to 'muddle through' and cope, but resilience is about tackling things that are bothering you head on, forging ahead, seeing problems as opportunities or challenges and making choices that can lead to positive changes.

You need resilience most when:

- something is making you stressed or unhappy
- you need to adapt to a new situation
- you feel that the only way to solve your problems is to drop out.

As a resilient person you can focus your thinking and take control of each situation. You become able to work out what needs to be done to sort out each situation and make best use of those around you to get there.

What are resilient people?

The students we interviewed, whose stories and tips can be found throughout this guide, described resilient people as:

"Someone who, when the world tries to knock them down, refuses to fall. And it's grit and determination."

"Strong minded and strong willed ... and focused on what you are there for and what you need to do to get there."

"People who have had obstacles in their life and have managed to push themselves through adversity – that's where they get strength from to think that it's possible."

"Someone who can get there, no matter what things are happening along the way."

"Someone who comes back around."

Characteristics that resilient people have include strong relationship skills, flexibility, a good sense of humour, good problem-solving skills, a clear sense of purpose, the ability to deal with stress, and self-determination.

Most importantly, resilience is not something a person is born either with or without. Some people may have developed more resilience than others because of previous life experiences but everyone has inner strengths that they can draw on when facing difficulty. Resilience is something you can develop and learn at any time in your life.

Omar

While I really enjoyed my course, from the beginning I found it very difficult to settle into life at my hall of residence and this really started to adversely affect me and my studies.

Did you face any challenges? I found the noise, the distractions and the general difference in approach to communal living very difficult to deal with. Because of that I found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on my studies, particularly trying to work in my room.

How did you feel? I felt incredibly frustrated and annoyed as well as disappointed that I wasn't making the progress with my studies that I should have been.

What did you do? I realised that moving to different accommodation was not practical due to my financial situation so I had to stick it out. I tried to remain focused on this being a short-term problem and not letting it distract me from my long-term goals of getting my degree. I made a real effort to communicate my frustrations to my flatmates, to explain how I was feeling and how they were affecting me. I had to be diplomatic and tactful whilst trying to negotiate better behaviour standards for the flat. I tried very hard to be flexible to meet them half-way.

What was the result? Things improved a lot and I actually learned to deal with stress better and also to understand what my flatmates wanted and expected. I hadn't really considered their views before. I think it has made me a more tolerant person who can deal with people better now than I used to be able to. I stuck it out and actually found it bearable to stay there. In the end though I found accommodation for the next year with more like-minded students in a rented house and I'm really happy!

Matthew

When I was younger, I didn't believe that university was for someone like me. I didn't know anyone who had been to university and it had always seemed to be somewhere 'other' people went to. However, once I'd made the decision to become a teacher, I realised that university was the route I was going to have to take. But when I got here I found it very difficult to settle and to make new friends.

Did you face any challenges? Everyone was very friendly but I felt the people I met didn't really understand me. I felt isolated and lonely and stopped making an effort. I went home regularly to see my family and friends and to surround myself with things that were familiar, which just made me even more isolated from people at uni.

How did you feel? I didn't feel like I would ever fit in and questioned whether I had made the right decision in coming to university. I felt I was in an alien world and seriously considered dropping out.

What did you do? Going home became increasingly impractical as my course progressed. I had to make a decision whether to leave uni or to stay and find a way to be less unhappy. I made a conscious effort to get more involved in university activities. I started volunteering and became a Student Ambassador.

What was the result? I met new people and started to make friends with people I liked and trusted. Getting more involved also helped give me a real sense of belonging. That made me feel that I had a right to be here. I am now much more settled and have been able to concentrate on my studies and am on course to achieve my goal of becoming a PE teacher. It made me realise that it is possible to go somewhere completely new and different and to cope and be happy. I think that will stand me in good stead when I leave and get a job, perhaps in another new town.

Lucy

I had battled with long-term mental health difficulties and family problems. I'm now at uni, but the problems have continued and have threatened to overwhelm me at times. I have seriously considered dropping out.

Did you face any challenges? It started after a few weeks of being here when I realised that I just couldn't cope with the coursework. I didn't know how to deal with the assignments we were given and everything kept building up. I was avoiding getting down to work which just made it worse. In the meantime my brother, with his own problems, moved in with me and that just made everything worse. I felt I'd had enough. I couldn't keep up and just wanted to leave.

How did you feel? I felt terrible, really down, low and depressed. I had really wanted to come to university but it all seemed to have gone wrong.

What did you do? Even though I felt so down, I knew I'd eventually find a way through, as I've always managed to keep going in the past. I recognised I needed help and I kept talking to the people I already knew could help, such as the counsellor and the student support services. Just talking to people helped me decide what to do next. I broke down all the things I needed to do into separate actions so that I could deal with one at a time. This made getting back on track a more manageable prospect rather than an overwhelming one. I found keeping my sense of humour really helped when things were tough.

What was the result? I talked to my brother about how I was feeling and we agreed that he would look for somewhere else to live. Eventually he moved out which helped. I also spoke to my tutors about the work I was struggling with and used Skills for Learning to get support. I stayed on at uni, and am expecting a 2:2 or better, and I am on track for a Masters or PhD in due course. I have learned that talking to others is the best start because it helps to put things into perspective and you can see what the real problems are and how to deal with them.

How can you become more resilient?

Do you know what is really causing you stress?

You may be unable to focus on your course work, or be sleeping badly at night, but the real problem could be that you are worrying about your finances, so it is important to identify the underlying issue, so that you can tackle it effectively. Talking to others is important since it could help you to determine and realise this – using support is not an admission of failure but a recognition that you don't have to deal with things alone and that there is help out there for you.

What strengths do you have that you can draw on?

Resilience is not something you either have or don't have. It is a way of thinking and behaving that anyone can learn. Recognising the resilient traits you already have can help give you the confidence to tackle your problems. At the back of this guide there is a self-assessment checklist to help you identify the strengths you already have and whether you could further build on or develop these. There is also guidance throughout the booklet on how to do this.

Producing a plan of action It sometimes helps to write your goals down so that you can look at them when things get tough. Don't be afraid to review and change them over time. Remember if you make your goals too big and long-term you may find that you fail or give up before achieving them. It may be better to have a series of smaller actions over a longer timescale. Things may not change overnight but at least you will have re-established control.

Have you thought about all the possibilities?

What works for one person might not for another so you don't have to simply copy what everyone else is doing. For example, your course mate's way of coping with exams may be to work solidly without a break but you might need to take time out, relax and refocus. Try and be creative and persistent in your approach; it may not be the first or most obvious person who will ultimately be of most use. Don't forget, using the resources of the university, such as the Library and counselling services, is a right and entitlement that you have paid for!

Independence and self-direction

Resilient people often have a strong sense of identity and self-awareness and are good at motivating themselves. They can look at situations in a positive way, are good decision-makers and can positively influence people and situations around them.

Sarah

I'm 20, in the second year of my course and came to university because I wanted to see the big wide world out there, gain independence and I had the encouragement of my parents.

Did you face any challenges? I had difficulty settling in when I first came, I felt I didn't have anybody and didn't fit in with the people on my course who I saw as not being their real selves. I also suffered problems with my flatmates, but I didn't want to be seen as "that person who had a problem" so I didn't say anything.

How did you feel? I wasn't looking for the 'typical' university experience of getting drunk but believed there was a lot of pressure on me to do things that maybe I didn't want to do. This really deterred me, I rang my parents upset and, at the time, I thought about changing course and university.

What did you do? I worked as a student assistant in halls and became involved in extra-curricular activities. Through this I made friends with more my sort of people and they became my family and helped me to see that university life is hard whenever you move away from home and to wise up – that there were people who didn't want to go out and get drunk and knew what they wanted to do, how they wanted to get there. I was bullied at school and so drew on that experience; if I hadn't been through that I wouldn't have been able to face this so I think it gives you a lot of inner strength.

What was the result? This experience made me a better person and gain a lot of confidence – I feel I know how to approach people, have better communication skills and am upfront with people – if there is a problem I will talk to people about it. Making a range of friends reminded me I'd never been part of the popular crowd and that it's good to be different, to make a stand and have your own opinion and be strong with it, to stand up for what you believe in and be your own person, do what you want to do, not what you think everyone else wants you to do. I'm enjoying my studies, I know I can do well but don't necessarily see my future in this and have a number of ideas but I know that if I want to do something I will – nobody is going to stop me from doing it.

Ideas

- Take hold of opportunities. Your time at university is largely shaped by you. With a sudden amount of freedom this could be the first time you are fully independent. You can shape your time and yourself while you study.
- Try to build routines in your life. This can help you to feel in control and on top of things and can help you maintain a good study/work/life balance.
- Believe in yourself. It can be difficult when other people have always taken charge, but making your own decisions, relying on yourself and taking responsibility for your choices can be a really positive experience. If you already manage external responsibilities, then have faith in yourself that you can successfully apply yourself to your course as well.
- Take care of your finances. Everybody worries about their financial situation, so you will not be alone. It is important to budget and monitor your financial situation and seek advice if you need it. If you resolve any money problems then you will be able to focus more on university life and where you are heading.

- Work out who you are. Coming to university can be liberating and allow you to learn who you are and be who you want to be. You don't have to follow the crowd and can find where you fit in and get involved in what you want to do. Your family and friends' support is important to you while you study but remember why you are here. You can strive to make your own choices and follow your own path – it's your experience and your future.
- Try to build on what you already have. Recognise what you are good at and try to develop and apply this. If you think there are areas for improvement then look at ways of doing this and seek guidance. The exercise 'Are you a resilient person?' in this booklet provides a way for you to start thinking about your skills and attributes.
- Ask for help. Admitting you need help is a positive step. There are numerous services within the University to help you with any issues that you may be facing, be they emotional, physical or practical. If you aren't sure whether you are heading in the right direction academically then you could talk to your tutors or others on the course. Whatever you feel you need help with there should be some information or support available to you.
- Enjoy your independence. But learn how to manage it!



Find something that you are good at doing, whatever that may be. If you can build your confidence then you can translate this across to other aspects of university, like your studies.

Elsa

I'm 19 and in my first year, living at home. I want to do well and personally feel that you need to be a bit more educated to move forward so decided to come to uni.

Did you face any challenges? Starting university was a difficult leap for me; I didn't do an A-level in the subject, whereas other people had, so it was quite hard for me. Plus I found people had certain groups that they'd talk to and not others, but I think it's important that you get on with others because if you don't it could infringe on your ability to learn and your performance.

How did you feel? I felt in a totally different atmosphere, you miss high school and it's a strange atmosphere and you don't know anyone. Having to do your own private study – it's a big leap of independence; you're not forced to do your work, but it's like you have paid for the course, so you have to do your study. I also get really bad migraines when I am stressed, so can find it difficult to balance everything.

What did you do? I am quite a religious person and use relaxation and meditation as it calms you down, and I contact my family; but feel everyone needs to make an effort to communicate both ways with each other if you want to feel comfortable. I think it's all about managing your time effectively too; I was able to do that, but others can't and I'm aware Skills for Learning do sessions on that. But sometimes in your first year you don't know where all your facilities are to go for support; I know the Student Liaison Officer can help you and sometimes people like to have counselling. Just getting information on what to do, even with simple problems, is important because if someone is really struggling and they don't know what to do they need to seek some kind of help.

What was the result? I think everyone has some kind of difficulty but after a while I kind of got used to things. I am a person who tends to think about the future quite a lot and you have to be motivated if you want to study, because there are times as a student when you just think, I can't be bothered doing my work any more – where's it going to take me? But I just think, you never know if you don't try. I think you need that attitude and to draw on your confidence. I have found my course interesting and coming to uni has been a positive change. In the future I want independence and to make a difference in the world, even if it's a minor difference, it would still feel like a success in my life.



I think it's better to have tried and not been right than not tried.



Getting on with people

Resilient people are good at getting on with others. They are effective communicators who can work well with others to solve problems and they can see the value in keeping a good sense of humour when everything seems to be going wrong. Making friends and building good relationships with your lecturers and other staff is key to helping you to get the most out of your time at university. However, these skills may not always come naturally and it may be necessary to push yourself to develop them.

Bill

I'm studying project management part-time, am 43 and one of my main motivations to come to uni was because no-one in my family had a degree. It was also a personal motivation because I wanted to prove that I had the capability and partly because I felt inferior in the way I was, because I hadn't got the academic achievements of others in my industry even though they didn't have the practical experience and the knowledge I had gained.

Did you face any challenges?

Balancing work and study was hard work and there have been a lot of sleepless nights, plus I was made redundant. So it has been a real challenge and it affects the quality of your work/life balance. Plus, I am not an academic type of guy, I am practical and I also found the full-time students different as they have just left school, don't know much about the subject and don't have the experience.

How did you feel?

Obviously I am not a young student, but I would like to think I can feel empathy for them and I'm comfortable now as I have sort of found a role as they have been using me as a mentor and the lecturers use me as a tool to get some debate and interaction going too. But sometimes the pressures of work and study meant I felt as if I'd hit a brick wall and there were times when I felt like packing it in.

What did you do?

I used my experience, and that has helped me get through the course. I think that my apprenticeship and basic fundamental experience meant I had a good grounding and so gave me strengths, and being practical – I had to see that as what I have. But I also spoke to my tutors and built relationships with them, and they were supportive, gave me some flexibility and set me challenges and milestones that I could achieve. They said: right, this is what you need to do – take a couple of days off, take the dog for a walk, they gave me a structure and when I thought: "I don't know how I am going to get through this", they reassured me. I also had a designated buddy on the course and that was great as you go through the pain together – we rang each other up and you mentor each other to get you through it, which is important, especially if you feel isolated. Basically, I feel I am a very passionate person and, because of my character, I always strive to achieve, and I would remember my personal motivation – so you have to get through all the lows, and you have got to earn it, have that drive, and say: "Right, I am definitely going to finish it now."

What was the result?

I have enjoyed it; I've learnt a lot of new things and a different dimension of my industry, so it's been very fulfilling. Looking forward, personally, I want to be spending more time with the family, but work-wise, potentially I could be anywhere in the world as it has opened up avenues for me. As for all the hard work I have done, I want to make sure I get some fruits out of the labour and now, in one year's time I would like to have my plaque on the wall with my degree in the bag.

Remember, we can't always go it alone. Be open to accept or give help.



Do not be afraid to ask for help, keep talking and asking questions and inquiring. It is better to have asked than to be left wondering. By talking and listening to other students, you can often find out about services.

Ideas

- Get out and about. Meeting new people is one of the best things about going to university, but it can sometimes feel really difficult. Try to seek out like-minded individuals – the Students' Union has many clubs and societies to join, from sports to drama to mature student groups. So see if there is something running that reflects your interests, what you enjoy or are good at.
- Do something familiar and reassuring. Try to keep doing your hobbies and interests as this can keep you grounded. It could be as simple as going to the gym, listening to music, reading or watching your favourite TV show.
- Touch base with friends and family. Don't forget that even though they might be far away, friends and family can be supportive. If you live with your family, then let them know how you are getting on and what you have been doing.
- It's good to talk and ask questions. Don't feel that you should know everything right from the start – it can take time to settle in to university. Staff are there to support and guide you, so use them as a resource but also ask your fellow students. You may find it's a good way to 'break the ice' and make new friends.
- You can share your worries and concerns. In many cases, "a problem shared is a problem halved" is very true! If your tutors, other staff, friends and family cannot help directly, they may be able to point you in the right direction.
- Say yes to things! Don't always just stick to familiar things, otherwise you may miss out on many of the new and exciting things university has to offer.
- Get involved! You may not feel confident about what you can contribute but everyone has something to offer. You could start by speaking up in class and taking an active role in your course. You could also do some volunteering – develop skills, meet new people and begin to feel more involved in university life.

Kay

I am 19 and a first-year student, I always knew that I would go to uni, my auntie and uncle went to uni and they have great jobs. I wanted to get away from my home town to meet new people and make new friends.

Did you face any challenges? Back home I played sport at county standard, but when I got here and joined the team it seemed very élitist, so I stopped training. As a result of this I had too much time on my hands and didn't know what to do with myself. The more free time I had, the less uni work I did and the more unorganised I became. As well as this I felt that I had already learnt a lot of the course content during my A-levels and we were recapping. It was hard because I thought when I came to uni I would meet regularly with tutors, but when I got here it wasn't the case and when I tried to speak to the course leader he was very dismissive.

How did you feel? I felt very down in the first year; I had moved away from home; things were new and very different. I started to question why I was at university and didn't have a lot of motivation to do my studies. I felt that I got the motivation from doing sport and it was really hard when I wasn't playing.

What did you do? I looked at myself and thought "this isn't you"; so I got more involved. I went to student meetings, so I could have more input into how the course was run, and started working with the Get Ahead team. I started going to the gym again and now I go quite a lot, it gets me up and motivated which gives me energy to do my studies.

What was the result? I managed to successfully finish my first year and I am doing a placement abroad next year. I am looking forward to this and hope it will be more challenging. When I finish my placement I am going to apply for the women's netball and football team.



Problem solving

People who are resilient are able to identify and talk about their problems. They are able to find different solutions, trying these out until they get the result they need, while learning from the process. The types of problem-solving skills they have which make them successful can include the ability to plan and think critically, resourcefulness, creativity, initiative, self-discipline and insight.

Jodie

I'm 23 and a final-year student, I was alright at school, a pretty average student – having said that going to university seemed like a natural progression for me. Both my parents and sister had gone and got good jobs as a result, which is really important to me.

Did you face any challenges? My dissertation was based on a specialised project that my tutor was doing, but halfway through she left without telling me. I was given a new tutor, but as far as I could work out there was no handover between them. My new tutor didn't have the specialised knowledge that I needed to help me finish my dissertation and he also expected a completely different writing style. I found him really hard to get hold of, and felt I couldn't work with him.

How did you feel? I was really worried and felt totally let down by both of my tutors. Part of me just didn't care any more and I just wanted to hand it in as it was. The problem was that I really wanted to do well.

What did you do? I knew I had to do something about the situation, or I'd fail. I refused to be defeated and calmed myself down. I tried to follow the module handbook as closely as I could and worked together with some other students who were doing similar dissertations. We were able to support each other quite well. I also went to the Head of Department and explained the difficulties I had been having. She took me seriously and could see that I had really tried to do my best.

What was the result? My new tutor contacted me very soon afterwards and I was able to talk to him about my dissertation; this time I found him helpful. The Head of Department also organised a group meeting for all of us so that we could talk about the issues that we had. I felt listened to and was so glad I'd not just given up. I was able to complete my dissertation successfully and went on to get a 2:1.

Ideas

- Identify the problem and what is causing it. Gather facts and reflect on them in a reasonable and balanced way. Work out what the key issues are and what might help. It is important to be honest and realistic about the outcome you would like.
- Give yourself space to think. It is difficult to think straight when you are in the middle of noise and chaos. Find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed and try to avoid distractions.
- Prioritising is the key to success. Step back and think about what is really important, what really needs to get done. This can help you make decisions and stop you feeling overwhelmed.
- Try to plan ahead and be organised. Make sure you have read all your course information and know what you need to do and when your deadlines are. Think about time spent on practical activities or socialising as well as study – creating your own timetable can help you balance commitments.
- Look at a number of different options. Make an action plan of how you are going to tackle your problem and decide on the steps you need to take. It may help to write down a list of pros and cons to help you decide which approach to try first.
- Try to be flexible. There will be times of uncertainty and stress and you may need more than one plan or be willing to revise or rethink your initial strategy, but learning how to adapt and survive during these times without getting frustrated can help you through.



- Monitor your progress. It can be helpful to keep a diary or log to see how far you've come in solving a problem. Sometimes it is hard to see the progress you have made but this can help you to acknowledge your successes.
- Take a break! If you begin to lose your focus, put things on the back burner for a while and allow yourself to consider another task or just take some time out to relax.
- Speak out if you need to. If you feel that you are being treated unfairly or getting insufficient support or guidance then say so. Things can't change if you don't speak out.
- Try to be creative. Not all problems will have simple solutions and the way you usually deal with issues may not be the best way of tackling things now – try and think of new and inventive ways of problem solving. This might involve taking calculated risks or stepping out of your comfort zone.

- Seek support from others. Other people can be great sources of advice and support, but don't expect them to solve your problems for you. Explore as many different avenues of information and support as you can find such as the internet, University staff, friends/families and other support networks. You are unlikely to be the first person to have faced a particular problem so use the experiences of people who have gone before you.
- Link into available resources. There are a host of resources available for you to tap into both inside and outside the University, depending on your particular issues. Information about these services can be found on the University website.
- Keep practising. The best way to develop your problem-solving skills is to practise them!

Alex

I'm 19, doing Architecture and both parents went to university and my sister is in Leeds too. It was my choice to come though and I had no gap year or anything, but went through GCSE, then two years at college and straight to university.

Did you face any challenges?

It's quite a big commitment with it being a long course and you have to get used to independent learning and doing a lot of it on your own. It gives you a chance to be creative and do your own thing but it's also quite easy to get behind if, say, you were to miss a couple of days. There have been stressful times and there is a lot of work to get done as well as extra things such as printing and stuff like that which all adds to it – you have to put a lot of hours in.

How did you feel?

It was quite a big jump and a steep learning curve which was a shock at first but I've not really had any doubts to be honest and have never really had a point where I have thought, right, that's it, I'm going to drop out of the course, but a couple of my friends have left or didn't do so well, mainly because of the workload and a lot of it being independent.

What did you do?

It's just a case of getting your head down, getting the work done and doing it on your own, I've found. Having your own timetable outside of uni to stick to helped break the workload down and I resisted going out or time wasting. I tried to get up early, go to uni, get the work done, then go home rather than get up a couple of hours later and do it at home. I also think it does help to get a bit of encouragement from your friends because everyone is in the same position. But you can also see your tutors as they can help in finding extra resources – some of them have gone out of their way to help me with certain projects. You can have coaching sessions too, so they can have a look at how you're doing. If you're struggling or thinking of dropping out they can maybe let you come back to do the year or parts of it again and they also look at different career paths or moving to another course, which some people have done. So you can use the resources you have and plan – I think it's good to speak to somebody who is actually in the profession to ask them what their uni experiences were like and those who have done my year already, so I can be more prepared.

What was the result?

I think I'm better organised and have learnt from my experiences and from independent working. I can break the project down and in terms of other commitments, be it going home or whatever, can schedule those into my workload. I've learned to deal with things better and be more prepared if a problem were to arise. I have always been pretty confident that I can do this, that I've got the ability, whereas some people get themselves down and think "I can't do it". Obviously, there are times when I might not get as much work done as expected, but when it comes down to it I can be quite resilient and have always just kept going. I now plan to do my postgrad and become fully qualified, then go out and do my own thing, without anyone looking over my shoulder, and make a name for myself.



Sense of purpose

Resilient people tend to know where they are going and they are focused, motivated, energetic and have an awareness of what they want to do with their lives. Making the decision to study in higher education may be as far as you have got in thinking about your future or you may already know where you want to get to in life. It is not always easy to be clear about what the next steps are and you may also be faced with doubt and uncertainty about what you are hoping to achieve. But drawing on your inner thoughts and skills, as well as seeking information and guidance, may help you to develop a sense of purpose and to build focus, be able to cope with adversity and head in the right direction for you.

Toby

I'm in my second year, am 28 and neither of my parents went to university, but they always encouraged me to go out and find my own feet. I've been into sports since childhood and had thought about teaching it but originally came to Leeds for work and put uni on the back-burner. It took me a while to realise that this is what I really I want, though, and so I decided to come to university.

Did you face any challenges? I had a ten-year gap from education so I was maybe less prepared for how university worked than others, such as how to reference and about marking schemes.

How did you feel? It was a big decision for me to come to university as I had been working for a long time. My access course helped to get me into writing essays and researching, so I had some background in this and feel the transition into university has been smooth, but I'm now anxious over the number of places available on the PGCE course, which is the next step in wanting to be a teacher.

What did you do? My age and the time taken to realise what I wanted to do means I feel more passionate about it and want to do it more. My experience of work and life has given me a more mature outlook on things, how to address things and make changes, and has made me used to dealing with setbacks and able to learn from things. So, I found out how the course worked and what I needed to do – I do the reading and turn up to lectures and have built relationships with my tutors. I asked what I need to do to get ahead in terms of the next course and spoke to staff and students, I've got this mentality where I will go and find out myself.

What was the result? I don't feel I have been overstretched and am loving my course, it's fantastic – and if I don't get on the PGCE course I have thought of other options and am prepared to study elsewhere or reapply the following year. You have to have a plan and stick to it, but also know when it isn't working and so have a back-up plan. I'm just not someone who is afraid to make mistakes – I'm not afraid to fail and would rather regret something I did than something I didn't.

Ideas

- Have a goal. It doesn't have to be a major career or life-changing goal. A simple decision to join the gym, ask classmates out for a drink or enhance your study or personal skills can help give you a focus.
- Join in. Active participation in university life can help you to develop a sense of purpose and belonging. The Students' Union will have a list of all the clubs and societies you can join, you can become a student rep or a student ambassador or consider volunteering. If there's nothing you like the look of then you can even start up your own group!
- Talk to your tutors, other students or the Careers Service. Many students are unclear about where their course might lead them. The Careers Service will be able to help you look at your skills and interests and to think about what you want in the future. Ask about the



Remember this is only a short period of your life – in the grand scheme of things, this will not last forever even though it may seem like it at the time.

types of jobs students on previous courses have taken up. See if they can put you in touch with people working in the sector your course might lead to.

- Find your role. For example, you may be an older student who can impart your experience to younger students or you could use your enthusiasm to motivate or inspire others.
- Remember why you wanted to come to university. Think back to why you applied, if you felt excited, what your fears and expectations were and what you wanted to achieve.
- Reflect. Think about or write down what you have already learnt, overcome or achieved – it may help you to see how you have developed and structure where you'd like to go now.
- Recognise that change can be positive. Change allows us to grow and develop, learn about who we are and where we are going, whatever our age.
- Acknowledge what you are good at. Place value on yourself and draw on your strengths: use these as a focus.
- Hang on in there. If you do know what you want to do after university then keep focused on this, persevere and accept that there may be difficult times and setbacks but remember what you are here for and try to keep motivated.
- Visualise success. Whether that's how you'll feel when you get that essay in on time, on graduation day or a more long-term goal – imagine what you'll feel like when you get there.

Try to keep hold of your dream.

I think if you have a goal, anyone can do it.

Jennie

I'm 20 years old and my mum was a real inspiration to me coming to university as she completed her degree as a mature student while I was growing up. I really want to get good grades so that I can go on to do a PhD.

Did you face any challenges? I am in my second year and the initial buzz of coming to university is over and the end doesn't seem to be in sight. This year money has been a lot tighter and I have struggled with the increased workload and a group project.

How did you feel? It is getting me down and I am finding it really hard to motivate myself. We have a group project which is really difficult because no-one seems to be pulling their weight. I am avoiding my work and spending more money than I can afford, which is making me feel extremely frustrated.

What did you do? I made sure that I talked to my friends and family about what was going on and how I was feeling. They were great and helped me remember why I was at university, which really got me focused again and I was able to concentrate on getting my work done. With the group project I worked closely with my best friend who was also in the group and we supported each other. I was also able to write honest feedback about other group members on the assessment forms. I have also started looking for summer jobs to help my financial situation and spoken to the bank about my overdraft.

What was the result? I finally completed all my work and feel loads more positive about being at university and going into my third year. I am quite an ambitious person and realise that staying focused and making sure I talk to people when I am worried is the key to helping me achieve my dream job.



Resources guide

There are many resources available for you to tap into both inside and outside the University. Don't be afraid to use all the different resources that you can and to ask if you are not sure.

General

Helpzone

The Helpzone is there to provide information on the services available to you. Each campus has a Helpzone and the Helpzone website is designed to give you a complete list of services and facilities within the University.

0113 812 3115/0113 812 3176 or
helpzone@leedsmet.ac.uk
<http://helpzone.leedsmet.ac.uk/>

Students' Union Advice

0113 812 8408 or su.studentadvice@leedsmet.ac.uk

Financial Advice

Contact the Helpzone for support and appointments.
http://helpzone.l3leedsmet.ac.uk/financial_advice.htm

Financial Support

0113 812 6701 or sfss@leedsmet.ac.uk
http://helpzone.leedsmet.ac.uk/financial_support.htm

Careers and Education Guidance

0113 812 5995
careers@leedsmet.ac.uk
www.leedsmet.ac.uk/careers

Jobshop

0113 812 7444 (Headingley Campus)
 0113 812 6700 (Civic Quarter)
jobshop.info@leedsmet.ac.uk
www.leedsmet.ac.uk/jobshop

Disability Support

0113 812 8519 or disabilityservices@leedsmet.ac.uk
<http://disability.leedsmet.ac.uk/main/index.htm?mid=1>

Accommodation Office

0113 812 3278 or accommodation@leedsmet.ac.uk

Unipol

0113 243 0169
www.unipol.leeds.ac.uk

Libraries

0113 812 3106/ 0113 812 5968 (Civic Quarter)
 0113 812 3164/ 0113 812 7467 (Headingley Campus)
infodesk.lc@leedsmet.ac.uk
<http://libraryonline.leedsmet.ac.uk/>

Skills for Learning (runs workshops on building study skills – for example essay/report writing, note taking, IT skills, giving presentations, and offers sessions on personal development such as time management)
 0113 8125487 or skillsforlearning@leedsmet.ac.uk
<http://skillsforlearning.leedsmet.ac.uk/>

International Students

www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat
www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/advice.htm
 International Student Advice: contact the Helpzone for support and appointments
 English language support during study:
 0113 812 7440 or elt@leedsmet.ac.uk
www.leedsmet.ac.uk/international/lang/ecis

Childcare

0113 812 6701
<http://helpzone.leedsmet.ac.uk/childcare.htm>

Assessment

A Student Guide to University Assessment to help new or prospective students understand what university assessment is all about has been produced by the First Level Assessment and Feedback project. Copies are available from:
 0113 812 9212
j.priestley@leedsmet.ac.uk
<http://flap.teams.leedsmet.ac.uk/>

Travel

<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/metoffice/estateservices/transport/>

Equality & Diversity Issues (includes information on the Dignity and Respect Network, Mediation Services and Student Equality Groups and Forums)
0113 812 5472 or diversity@leedsmet.ac.uk
www.leedsmet.ac.uk/diversity

Course Contacts

Remember that your tutors and support staff within your course or Faculty, such as course administrators, course/level leaders or personal tutors, can help too. To find how to contact these staff, refer to your course handbook or visit your Faculty webpages on:
<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/facultiesnew.htm>

The university has many students – there will be like-minded individuals out there.

Wellbeing

There are various resources that can support you with personal, emotional or health matters.

Counselling

0113 812 5974 or
counselinfo.students@leedsmet.ac.uk
<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/counselling/>

Samaritans

08457 909090
www.samaritans.org
NHS Direct (for a list of GPs in Leeds, drop-in centres and medical advice)
0845 4647 or <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>
NHS drop-in centre: 0870 818 0003

Chaplaincy

(a multi-faith team provides support for all)
0113 812 3184
<http://helpzone.leedsmet.ac.uk/chaplaincy.htm>

Student Safety

www.good2bsecure.co.uk
www.westyorkshire.police.uk
Neighbourhood helpline
0113 343 1064
neighbourhoodhelpline@leedsmet.ac.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

<http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

Joining in with social activities can make you feel more involved and more connected to uni, you feel a part of it and not just a number. If you feel that you belong then you will be less likely to drop out.

Getting involved

Taking up opportunities while at university can not only enhance your social life but can help you develop new skills and enhance your employability.

Students' Union

Clubs, societies and events:
<http://www.leedsmetsu.co.uk/>

Student Representation (acting as a rep for those on your course to feedback your views and suggestions to the University) If you want to be a rep contact your course/level leader or course administrator for information.

Volunteering (there are opportunities to volunteer overseas as well as various projects in the community)
0113 812 3039 or volunteering@leedsmet.ac.uk
<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/cpv/index.htm>
Volunteering via the Students' Union:
<http://www.leedsmetsu.co.uk/student-development/volunteering/> CALM@leedsmet.ac.uk

Study Abroad

0113 812 3302
http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/international/index_International_Exchanges.htm
studyabroad@leedsmet.ac.uk

Student Ambassadors/Get Ahead team

0113 812 5907 or getahead@leedsmet.ac.uk
Help raise the aspirations of young people through a variety of events taking place both at the University and within local schools and colleges.
http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/getahead/index_Student_Ambassadors.htm

Sport

Carnegie Sports Centre: 0113 812 3160
www.leedsmet.ac.uk/sport

Entertainment

www.leedsliveitloveit.com





For further information contact:

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